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ABSTRACT

Preparing school leaders should not be a dispassionate, value-free journey that produces administrators who are technocrats with neither objective curiosity or passion. Lewis & Clark, a small liberal arts college near Portland, Oregon, initiated an administrative certification program in 1981. The curriculum of this program focuses on holistic clinical education through the integration of various concepts including looking at administrative practices in context and building a strong liberal arts educational foundation by studying educational history, philosophy, and ethics. The document also emphasizes gaining a new respect for the practitioner's knowledge and realizing that administrative education should help students to be creators of knowledge rather than consumers of the ideas. Students in the program are encouraged to keep a learning journal, contribute to the agenda for their education, teach what they have learned, and develop student cohort relationships to facilitate future peer consultation, networking, and independence. The pedagogy respects students as mature, experienced adults when emphasizing conceptualization during field observations, practitioner contacts, and student presentations of synthesized theory and research. The transformation from didactic frontal teaching to providing experience leading to conceptualization has begun. (KM)

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PREPARING SUPERINTENDENTS FOR THE UNEXPECTED, THE UNANTICIPATED AND THE UNTOWARD

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Preparing Superintendents for the Unexpected, the Unanticipated and the Untoward

The Institute for Executive Leadership at Lewis & Clark College

Patricia A. Schmuck

Picture a dark and wet Friday evening in late February. Its Oregon, of course its raining. Fifteen administrators straggle in one by one for the 5:00 class. Their assignment is to present a content analysis and evaluation of their district policy.

Each person comes in with a story to be told (this cohort has been together for 3 terms so they know each other well). One principal laments a child abuse case, another reports on a run-away-child and ends in tears, another complains about gang activities and how the entire day was spent with the police. The stories go on, a broken furnace, a grievance filed by a custodian. It is a bedraggled lot on a dark, rainy Friday evening. It is not what one would consider a teachable moment. Class begins, teams make presentations on policy handbooks and we plod through the assignment. Energy is low, discussion is limited. At the break, as we gather round the coffee pot, I suggest we stop the class early and everyone go home. We have a full day class tomorrow and I am frustrated and empathic. I am surprised by their reaction. One person says, "my god, the ONLY way I could deal with the child abuse case today was to have some confidence that our district policy could guide me

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through this." Another says "I'm not ready to go home, I was looking forward to coming here tonight to talk about this, I can't just focus on the individual case or I will lose my sanity." Another says, "My only consolation today was understanding the larger picture -- I see how district policy directly impacts the lives of my students." We continue the class, it is a bit livelier. It was not a lively class but the issue of policy was alive in their experience. While it was not one of our finest hours, it is was memorable.

Another episode. It is a sunny Saturday in September. We are role playing a school board meeting; the board is faced with reducing a budget and implementing a new kindergarten program. (Oregon communities must pass a yearly operating budget and kindergartens are mandated in 1990). Roles are assigned; the superintendent, her staff, board members and audience members with a special interest. This role play comes after teams of students had visited a total of fifteen board meetings and had conversations with the superintendent about how the meetings were orchestrated. The role play looks like a lively board meeting; people take their roles seriously, there is much talk over an apparently insolvable situation. One board member says in passing, "I think the only way to get out of this bind is to pass the hat". He is ignored, the meeting continues with intensity. A member of the audience cleans out a used styrofoam coffee cup, puts in some change and passes it to the next person.

The discussion is so intense now that the coffee cup is passed from person to person without notice. People look at the cup, look what is in it, drop in notes or change. The meeting continues, roles are played with passion. No one mentions the coffee cup but it passes from person to person. That takes about 15 minutes. Discussion continues, finally the full cup reaches the Board Chair who is dumbfounded. She pours the cup's content out on her desk; the meeting still continues at full steam, and she threatens to ask a member of the audience to leave. Finally, the Board Chair jumps up and says "our problem is solved; the money has been raised, the commitment is here, the answer is found." Pandemonium breaks loose, there is applause, and there are a lot of apologies.

The discussion about the role play takes two hours. It was to have been an illustration of rational problem solving, the use of power, of conflicting stake holders and instead a miracle happened. You say it is only pretend, it is only a group of already committed educators making a miracle. Perhaps. But such miracles happen in real districts. Chemistry, magic, serendipity also happen along with good planning, getting your ducks in order and stacking the agenda. Wise administrators understand serendipity when it happens.

So what is the context of these two incidents? They are but two episodes of 220 class hours of The Institute for Executive Leadership, a five quarter program leading to the Basic School Superintendent Certificate at Lewis & Clark College.

The Institute for Executive Leadership at Lewis & Clark College

Lewis & Clark is a small liberal arts college on the outskirts of Portland founded in 1867 . It has an undergraduate School of Arts and Sciences for about 1,600 students, a Law School serving about 1,000 students and a Graduate School of Professional Studies, serving another 1,000 part-time students of which the Educational Administration Program is a part. Our Program was just created in 1981, and offers only the administrative certificate. The focus in on practitioners, collaboration with school districts, and educating professionals within the liberal arts context. The Institute was created in 1984 because we were dissatisfied with traditional training programs for superintendents, and the limited imagination and scope of some practicing superintendents. Two Institutes have been completed. Each Institute includes cohort of between 15-20 students for five consecutive quarters earning the Basic Superintendent Certificate. Most students are principals or central office personnel, some have earned the doctorate. Approximately 40 contact hours per quarter include two weekend retreats, beginning with

challenge course, and meetings two evenings and a full day Saturday monthly. The content and pedagogy of the Institute illustrate clinical knowledge in Educational Administration.

WHAT IS CLINICAL KNOWLEDGE?

There are three basic Components to clinical knowledge. It is holistic, knowledge created from practice, and is a cycle of experience, feedback, reflection and conceptualization.

Clinical Knowledge is Holistic

One exciting event of the 1980s has been the transformation of thinking about administrator preparation. At last we are listening to some critics and we are moving away from the theory based, ostensibly value free, objective movement of logical positivism as a model for preparing practitioners (Yeaky, Johnson, Adkison, 1986). We are transforming that older model of reductionist empiricism to one that views schools and leadership as a complex web of relationships and interdependence. We are transforming the image of the administrator as a technician who applies discrete behavioral skills to newer images such as "managers of culture (Schein, 1985), "leading with vision" (Bennis and Nanus, 1985), "reflective practice" (Schon, 1985), "making meaning" (Louis, 1980) and even some words that I remember from earlier years, such as "climate" (Withall, 1951; Fox, 1973)

While, on the one hand, I resist the hackneyed phrases and cliches of todays jargon, on the other hand, the power

of language is apparent in creating or demonstrating our new ways of thinking. I hope many of you will share the pleasure I feel in the passing of words and concepts such as "competencies" or "skills" or "behavioral objectives" -- those discrete and presumably measurable behaviors.

Preparing school leaders should not be a dispassionate, value-free, objective journey. One criticism of school administrators is that they are technocrats with neither, objective curiosity nor passion (Wolcott, 1973). I like Art Blumberg's way of thinking here. He, of course, comes down on the side of educational administration as a craft, rather than a science. He says that those who exercise the craft have "exquisite timing, passion, humor, a sense of the absurd and a ready made image of the world that doesn't exist but could (Blumberg, 1984).

How do we prepare superintendents to exercise such craft? How do we incorporate holistic thinking into a preparatory program for superintendents? Let me describe three components.

Administrative Practice in Context. Collective bargaining, strategic planning, policy development, community relations and finance are among necessary domains in which any superintendent must perform competently. Usually the practices in those domains are taught in discrete courses focusing on skill development. Although they are necessary skills and they must be learned, a superintendent's failure is

not usually due to the lack of these technical skills; it is due more to weakness in understanding that all practices are played out in a body politic, of people relations in a unique place, time and context. In the Institute these practices are not studied in discrete courses; they are woven in and out of the curriculum continuously.

Educational Foundations. Educators typically, are not well schooled in educational history, philosophy or ethics. Three questions guide our study through five consecutive terms: 1) Who should be educated? 2) Who should educate them? 3) What should they learn? As a nation, we have answered those questions differently and we will continue to do so. The current school reform movement has answered them differently than we answered them in the 1970s. In the Institute we address such questions. We read educational history, philosophy (with an emphasis on the critical theorists). Books have included: Tyack and Hansot's Mangers of Virtue (1982), Ravitch's, The Troubled Crusade (1983); (with accompanying reviews) and Aronowitz and Giroux, Education Under Siege (1985).

A Liberal Arts Focus. School administrators usually have been trained in Colleges of Education which convey a notoriously narrow world view. We read some classics, e.g. Antigone portrays the age old

dilemma of organizational loyalty and individual conscience, sociology, e.g. Bellah et al, Habits of the Heart, provides questions about American individualism and the collective good, political science e.g. Machiavelli, The Prince and James McGregor Burns, Leadership broaden the view of leadership. Two excellent sources of liberal arts education and professions are Clemans and Mayer, The Classic Touch: Lessons in Leadership from Homer to Hemingway, (1987) and Popper, Pathways to the Humanities in Educational Administration (1987).

Clinical Knowledge is Creating Knowledge from Practice

The debate between the educational administration professorate and the practitioners is time worn. I remember the poignant remarks of Egon Guba made at the Benson Hotel in Portland in 1967. He said it so well, I will use his words:

> My colleague at the University of Chicago, Jack Getzels, and I strove mightily to put the terms "nomothetic" and idiographic" into the vocabulary of every practicing administrator in the country... Almost inevitably this comment would come from someone in the audience, "What you say seems to make some sense, although I'm not sure I really know what you're talking about. Why don't fellows come down out of your ivory tower and tell us about your ideas in language that we can understand? How about showing us how to apply those ideas on the firing line'?
>
> "Well," we would say, "practice is hardly our concern. We don't know what the practical problems are. It's up to you administrators who have to deal with these problems every day to make the application...
>
> Thereupon the discussion would end in an impasse. The listeners would go away feeling that they had been led to the trough but kept from

> drinking, because the theoreticians had failed to say anything that made operational sense to them... It is only because they are uncooperative that we can't use what they have discovered."
>
> We, the speakers, would go away equally disillusioned, feeling that we had been pouring the water into their open mouths but that they had refused to drink. "For who," we would ask, "should be better able to appreciate and apply what we have to say than those who are daily involved with the very problems we have been analyzing? It is only because they are lazy and ignorant that they won't use what we have discovered."
>
> And so, to point the moral, the uncooperative researcher-theoreticians and the lazy, ignorant practitioners would go their own self-satisfied ways, each convinced that the fault for any lack of communication lay with the other (Guba,1968).

Donald Schon more recently, (1983) talks about the "high ground" of theoretical knowledge and the "swampy low lands" of professional practice. The Institute takes journeys into the veritable swamp full of alligators.

What I see happening today in the literature of the professorate, is a new respect for practitioner knowledge and the idea that programs should help students be the creators of knowledge, rather than the consumers of ideas from the Academy (see Murphy & Hallinger, 1987). We are moving away from the deductive modes of scientism, into the inductive modes of phenomenolgy and grounded theory as a strategy for helping practitioners make sense of a complex and interwoven set of organizational relationships.

Too much of current administrative preparation continues to assume the "One Best Model"; that there is a way to solve problems or a way to lead and manage a district. Perhaps it is our insistence on the "one best

model" which makes practitioners not only doubt our veracity, but our judgement. Practitioners know, especially those who are thoughtful and competent, that there is no "one best model". I agree with Boyd and Cooper's forthright yet gentle criticism about the limits of such thinking, They say, "nothing new, old wine in old bottles which have limited promise for improving program standards or administrator skills" (1988, P.265-66). Instead I prefer the image presented by March who describes the school administrator as making decisions under ambiguity in a diffuse system with a panoply of hierarchical artifacts such as plans, memos, meetings and rules. He describes the administrators life as that of the "unexpected, the unanticipated and the untoward (1976).

How do we help practicers create knowledge from practice?

Learning Journals: If we respect students, they must contribute their own agenda for learning. The Learning Journal is one mode for students to focus their thinking. E.M. Forster said, "how can I know what I think until I see it?". This is a new mode of learning for most educators and focused direction is necessary at the beginning, but I find this a particularly valuable reflective tool for students "finding their voices".

Practica: Each student works with a superintendent "mentor" or field supervisor in a self-tailored

practicum for two quarters. A learning contract is written, times for feedback are built in and it is each students responsibility to "teach" what they have learned. While a practicum is not a new idea, too often it is a perfunctory "hoop" with little opportunities for creating knowledge to teach others. It is the teaching of what is learned which puts the practicum in focus.

A Student Cohort: Isolation and a lack of social support are identified as major problems of administrators, especially superintendents. The student cohort is a critical component for helping practitioners see themselves as creators, rather than consumers of knowledge. It sets the ground rules for peer consultation, networking, and independence. The National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration advocates the supportive cohort idea: "The nature of professional work, complicated analyses and problem solving requires that students learn to value their colleagues and become accustomed to seeking and giving advice and working with other professionals," (Griffiths et al. 1988, pp 16-17). But merely bringing students together over time does not necessarily create the climate for seeking and giving of advice to one another. It has not been the model for teaching. There must be conscientious

effort toward team building. The first meeting of the Institute is a weekend retreat on a challenge course (See Long, 1987) and the second retreat focuses on team building and organization development. In each retreat the focus is on students as learners; they provide a rich metaphor for experience, taking risks and learning new skills. It is an appropriate metaphor for people in charge of other's learning. One student said after the first retreat, "I know these people better in 2 days, than I knew people in courses over 10 weeks".

Clinical Knowledge is a Cycle of Experience, Feedback, Reflection and Conceptualization

Pedagogy, or androgogy -- the teaching of adults -- must change. Our pedagogy must respect students as mature adults, and provide experiences under relatively controlled and safe settings. Larry Cuban chides us, the professorate, even those of us who teach pedagogy, as falling into the same trap as all teachers (1987). We do most of the talking, control the subject matter, and use the whole group to convey information and skills. We either have a profound arrogance or a basic insecurity that we must control the subject matter so tightly.

We must escape that trap. Our students have a reservoir of experience, are talented and thoughtful individuals capable of taking charge of their learning. It is our responsibility, as professors, to provide the

experience, to give feedback, to facilitate peer feedback, and push for conceptualization. (see Kolb, 1984).

How do we build cycles of experience, feedback, reflection and practice?

Simulations, Exercises and case studies. Organizational simulations and exercises provide rich opportunities to practice, get feedback, reflect, and practice again. (see Schmuck and Runkel, 1988) Use of prepared case studies of ethical situations, or student produced studies (writing a case study is a useful learning experience) provide opportunities for role playing, and good discussion.

Field Observations. The world of schools should be material for classroom analysis and appraisal. Assignments in the field such as interviews, data collection, observation provide grist for classroom discussion. Even though practitioners live in the real school world they don't have honed observational skills. They should be helped to see the world they live in through different lenses.

Practitioners Contacts. Practicing superintendents are invited to class regularly to discuss specific issues. The Institute culminates with a Superintendent Seminar; twenty superintendents are invited for a day of small group discussions on topics such as the exercise of power and authority, coping with conflict, balancing personal and

professional life. Not only do students appreciate the opportunity for informal discussion, but the superintendents for their part are pleased and honored to talk about their experiences. With confidentiality, we use such exchanges as opportunities to evaluate openly the practices of superintendents in the field.

Presentations and Synthesis of Theory and Research. The traditional mode of inquiry through reading, presentation and formal writing remains an integral part of the institute. Student team presentations, didactic presentations from "experts", presentations by the instructor are efficient in conveying some information. Formal papers expounding on research or theory or linking theory to practice are written each quarter and are shared in peer evaluation teams.

Conclusion:

Preparatory programs for school administrators, are changing. I see the transformation from a reductionist to holistic view, from the concept of administrators as consumers of knowledge to being the creators of knowledge, from didactic frontal teaching to providing experience leading to conceptualization. It is a healthy and needed change. From our historical vantage point, we have the benefit of a backward glance. We have seen the conceptual limits of administrators as managers of virtue, as science

based technocrats or as accommodating politicians (Culberton, 1988; Cooper and Boyd, 1987, Tyack and Hansot, 1982). Perhaps in the next phase of our work preparing school administrators we will see a joining together of the Academy and the world of practice, I hope the uncooperative know-it-all researcher-theoreticians and the lazy, naive, ignorant practitioners will, in fact, forge a new path for the rearing of the new generation of administrators. I, for one, like the direction we are headed.

A syllabus of the Institute is available from:

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